



Bluff Land Environment Watch
P.O. Box 315, Winona, MN 55987-0315

July 24, 2009

Stephanie A. Strength
Environmental Protection Specialist/RD
1400 Independence Ave. SW Room # 2244
Washington, DC 20250-1571
Sent via E-mail: stephanie.strength@usda.gov

RE: USDA Rural Utilities Service EIS Scoping for the CapX2020 La Crosse Project.

Dear Ms Strength:

I represent BLEW, a Winona area grassroots environmental organization which has been working since 1991 to protect the air, land and water in our community through education, organizing and direct action.

We have been participating in information meetings, public forums and public hearings on this proposed power line organized by CAPX 2020, the MN Department of Commerce, the Administrative Law Judge, legislators and other community organizations for the last 30 months. The more we learn about it, the more we have become concerned.

We do not believe the CAPX2020 is a good investment or a sound project. We recommend the "NO BUILD" alternative. We do not think taxpayers should finance any portion of the CapX2020 La Crosse Project through the USDA Rural Utilities Service. Some of the reasons for this are as follows:

N-004-001

- 1) There is no demonstrated need for the Twin Cities – Rochester – La Crosse line. Lower voltage power lines, existing generation and updated forecasts for peak demand do not support the need for the CAPX powerline in the Rochester area. This was acknowledged by Xcel Energy witnesses in evidentiary hearings before Administrative Law Judge Beverly J. Heydinger for the MN Certificate of Need.
- 2) In an era when major goals are being set by many states and the federal government to prevent catastrophic global warming, many want to increase wind and solar power use as an alternative to dirty coal. The CAPX2020 utilities have made no commitment to any amount of wind power on these wires and are, in fact, trying to remove the wind power ordered by the MN Public Utilities Commission on April 16, 2009, in their approval of the MN Certificate of Need for the Brookings segment of the CAPX powerline

N-004-001

Your comment has been noted. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement will describe, in detail, project purpose and need. The justification document which has been accepted by the RUS is the Alternative Evaluation study which is available at:
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement will be available on the RUS website at: <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>. Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement will be solicited after its publication.

N-004-002

- 3) The concept of generating large quantities of electricity in locations far from its end use and sending it to consumers via high voltage transmission lines is outdated and dangerous. Large amounts of electricity are wasted in this transmission process, thousands of huge unsightly power towers are necessary which consume enormous amounts of energy to make and install, and those of us who live and work under and around the high voltage power lines are subject to the effects of electromagnetic fields causing childhood leukemia.

N-004-004

- 4) Smart Grid technology will soon be available increasing the likelihood that much higher levels of efficiency by consumers and industry will substantially decrease the amount of energy needed to run our homes, communities and businesses. Even Xcel Energy has a Smart Grid pilot project in process in Bolder, Colorado. When this technology becomes available, it will make these power lines unnecessary and a waste of energy.

N-004-003

- 5) If the CAPX2020 power lines are constructed it will make it more possible for new coal plants to be operated successfully in the Dakota's with their energy transported via these lines to large metropolitan areas to the east where the cost of producing energy is higher. Many scientists have made it clear that one important step in controlling global climate change is to build no more coal fired power plants. Minnesota receives the mercury fall-out from coal plants to our west which contaminates the fish we consume from our rivers, lakes and streams which then affects the development of our children's brains. We cannot morally encourage any more coal power plants.

N-004-005

- 6) Finally, we who live in Winona area will be negatively affected by the CAPX2020 power lines. Two of the proposed River crossing routes go through Winona County and one route goes through Fountain City, WI, a neighboring community. Some of our members are highly trained biologists, authors of books on bird habitat/activity, and many spend time observing and appreciating the birds in the Mississippi river flyway. We know that the proposed 150-170 Ft. towers will have a negative impact on the annual migration of millions of birds and waterfowl up and down the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Even the CAPX2020 utilities state in their printed material that they "can decrease but not eliminate bird collisions" with the power lines. The powerline will cause fragmentation of habitat in a national wildlife refuge which is unacceptable.

N-004-002

Your comment has been noted. Potential impacts to human and livestock health and safety with regard to EMF will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

N-004-003

Your comment has been noted. Cumulative Impacts will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

N-004-004

Your comment has been noted. Smart grid technologies are in their development stage and are too new to offset the need for transmission line development to meet customer electric needs. The technologies appear promising but have not been tested to a degree that would allow development of an electric grid that depends on them. Therefore, smart grid technologies cannot offset the need for the CapX2020 transmission lines or any other lines currently proposed.

N-004-005

Your comment has been noted. Potential impacts to wildlife will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

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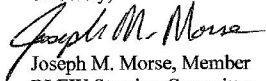
N-004-007

N-004-006

As an organization, we have spent considerable effort working to protect the bluffs in this area from the construction of unsightly buildings on bluffsides and ridgelines which cause erosion, landslides and damage the visual beauty of our communities. The proposed power line towers would severely detract from the efforts of both private and public organizations to preserve these visual resources which are important aesthetic and economic assets for Winona and Winona County. The powerlines would create a decrease in property values for many of the landowners in this area.

Thank you for taking the time to review these comments. We are hoping you will give our perspectives the same weight as the 11 utilities proposing this project.

Sincerely,



Joseph M. Morse, Member
BLEW Steering Committee
507.452.8232
josephmmorse@gmail.com

N-004-006

Your comment has been noted. Socioeconomic impacts to property values affected by the transmission line will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

N-004-007

Your comment has been noted. Potential impacts to the aesthetic quality of the areas surrounding the transmission line will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.